

CUDDY
AND OTHER STORIES

By MARGARET HILL McCARTER

LIBRARY EDITION

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FOURTH EDITION



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TO MY HUSBAND,

WILLIAM ARTHUR McCARTER



*"One love, one home, one heaven above,
One fold in heart and life."*

Cuddy

MORNING



HE woman in the rickety one-horse wagon had just reached the top of the long slope dignified by the neighborhood as "Basher's Hill." The horse, as if he knew the place, turned into the shade of two flat-topped stunted elm trees, and began to crop off the bluegrass lapping over the bank by the roadside. The driver lifted her drooping shoulders and let the reins fall from her hands. Pushing back the sunbonnet from her face, she drew in a deep breath of the sweet June air. A breeze was playing steadily about the hilltop, and in the shade of the trees the woman rested.

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She must have been more than fifty years of age, and her face had the criss-cross wrinkles that care and hard work chisel in with the passing time. Her eyes were intensely blue, and her hair, roughened by the sunbonnet, was a grizzly brown, with a wavy line through it suggesting the adornment it might once have been. Her complexion, too, had a clearness that even the Kansas sun and wind had not quite tanned over. Something in her face and general appearance gave a faint hint of an inborn gentility. It was but a hint, however, for her blue calico gown was ill-fitting, the shoes below it were coarse, and a sunbonnet is never a fashionable head-gear. The old wagon was freckled with little specks of paint, the horse was poor, and the harness a pieced-out set of mismated straps and twine strings.

It was yet early in the morning.

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From the hilltop the June landscape, fairer than any hand had ever the cunning to picture, stretched away until sky and earth were only one soft mist-fold of blended gray and amethyst. To the north the river glistened like a silver mirror in its leafy frame. Its winding valley reached across the scene for miles with its fertile corn-belt now tenderly green with waist-high corn, conforming to every turn of the stream. In the middle of its length the spires and domes lifting themselves above the treetops gave only a mere suggestion of the busy, noisy city hidden below. Farther away were yellowing wheat-fields and wide acres of alfalfa, green and purple in the sunlight; while the dip and swell of the prairie lands were brown with maturing early grasses, and dotted over with grazing cattle. The air was sweet with the odors of early summer.

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Overhead the sky was one magnificent sweep of unscarred blue. Only a little gray line, away to the southwest, gave sinister token of a storm-cloud crouching somewhere behind the edge of the earth.

The woman's blue eyes brightened as they took in the scene before her. Her face gave quick expression to what must have been an intense love of beauty. Half turning herself around, she looked back over the long way she had come, and her gaze rested tenderly on a far-away group of trees where the bend in the creek made a triangle of woodland.

"It's all mine at last," she said to herself; "there ain't no mortgage on that hunderd 'n' sixty. Lord! how I've worked for it. Year after year, interest and principal, and lapsin' payments, and then compound interest. But it's mine now—mine and

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baby's. It was the alfalfa done it. It got the mortgage off and it'll put my boy through the university. It's God's own good and perfect gift."

Once more her eyes followed the faint outline of her farm. "Some day I'll build on the top of that hill," she murmured, "an' when I'm too old to work hard I can rest in the evenin's and watch the sunsets. How beautiful they are, and how good the world is, anyhow!"

Glancing down into her wagon loaded with fruit and garden-stuffs, she hastily caught up the reins. "Get up, Chet; I can't set here all day with the sun gettin' hotter every minute. Them cherries—don't I know what them cherries is goin' to do for me, and *him*? Won't he be glad when he sees *me* at Commencement? Won't he kiss his Cuddy again? 'Cuddy'—he's

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never called me nothin' else since the night of that awful May rain when his father went down in the flood of that draw right in sight of home."

Her eyes were full of tears now.

"I held him in my arms that awful night. He was all I had left. Joe and the other children all gone. And he said so cunnin', 'Let me cuddle up wite close. You is my Cuddy now, and I'll always love you.' He was only four then, and now he is twenty-two, and goin' to graduate. And he's class orator, too. Wonder how I've lived through these eighteen years. But they're over now, bless the Lord! He was good to spare my boy and let him get an eddication. Nothin' counts if you can only get that. No sheriff ain't goin' to levy on that. I couldn't have learnin' myself, but I've got it for my baby."

She wiped away the tears and looked

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back once more at her far-away farm, sloping from the horizon line down to the stream and the trees hiding her home. A heavy wagon loaded with hay was creaking up the hill-slope toward her.

"That looks like Basher with my alfalfa," she thought; "I'll just wait a minute longer."

When the wagon came up, the face of the farmer atop the huge moving pile of fragrant alfalfa beamed with pleasure.

"Good-mornin', Mis' Perine; lookin' at the scenery?" he half shouted.

"Yes, Mr. Basher," she replied; "I allus love to rest here a minute. I've watched this view through my tears more'n once, but it ain't so this mornin'," she added quickly.

"No, I reckon not," Basher's voice filled the air. "Ain't no prettier scene this side the Yallegghany Mountains,

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ner t'other side neither, fur that matter. Beats all, the bewitchin' beauty of a Kansas prairie. Never seen no picture half as fine."

"This 'ere's the last of your first cuttin' of alfalfa," he shouted. "Forty dollars more in the First National Bank for Mis' Perine, Mis' 'Cuddy' Perine,—ain't that what your boy calls you?—and this forty 'll finish his schoolin'. My, but you're proud of him, *I* know. So's the neighborhood. Ye 've done mighty well by him. Gritty little woman," he added under his breath.

"Got a load of cherries there?" His voice grew louder with each turn of his thoughts. "Queer, now, how the Lord made cherries grow jest on your trees this year, and not another cherry in the whole country! An' me in that alfalfa field makin' hay is jest enough of a scarecrow to keep away all the birds

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on this side of the divide. Hope ye git a good price. Who buys 'em?"

"I take 'em all to Ancel's," answered Cuddy.

For a moment the farmer's face clouded. "Hope you git the money down." He did not speak so loudly this time. "Ancel, he gits a big salary from the railroad, but they do live high, put on no end o' style; and Mis' Ancel,—she was a Peyton 'fore marriage,—she never stunts herself, Mis' Ancel don't."

"They do owe me some," replied the widow. "They've took all my cherries, and this load 'll make about twenty-five dollars. But I'll git it all to-day."

"Well, well, I must be gittin' on. Good day, Mis' Perine. If you need any of this hay-money lemme know."

"Oh, I won't need it. It'll take all

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that for that college boy. But I've got plenty. Get up, Chet."

Her face was glowing with pleasure as she gathered up the lines, and slowly the wagon and horse passed down the long hillside and on toward the city.

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NOONTIDE



T was almost noon, and the sunshine was hot upon the pavements when Cuddy's horse, tired from his nine-miles drive, drew up in front of Mr. Ancel's handsome home. Mrs. Ancel and her daughter Muriel in dainty morning-gowns sat sewing in the shade of the vine-covered porch.

"There comes my cherry-woman, and here it is nearly noon." Mrs. Ancel's voice was musical, but it was the hard music of metal. "Those country people are too lazy to get into town until twelve o'clock. Well, Gusta will just have to can cherries this afternoon and iron to-night, that's all. It's cooler ironing at night, anyhow."

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Mrs. Ancel had always a grain of self-comfort in everything.

"Gusta!" she called twice before a big Swede girl with an immense tow-colored pompadour and a general absence of other noticeable features stood before her.

"Gusta, the cherry-woman is at the west door. Take all her cherries. I agreed to take all she had to sell off her hands." (Cherries were priceless that season, and would have sold well anywhere.) "And tell her, Gusta, that Mr. Ancel will be at home in two weeks, and I'll pay her all I owe her then. It must be nearly thirty dollars."

"Yes'm," and the girl disappeared. She stopped a moment before the little kitchen mirror to give her high-wrought pompadour a poke or two before going to the door. It must have been the thought of that which kept Gusta from noting Cuddy's eager look and

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trembling hands as she unloaded her boxes and baskets of cherries. Nor did the girl see the happy light in the widow's deep-blue eyes as she stood waiting after the last measure was emptied.

"Oh," said Gusta carelessly, "Mis' Ancel said to tell you Ancel will be home in two weeks and she'll pay you all she owes then; it's about thirty dollars."

The woman did not move.

"You come round in two weeks," said Gusta, holding open the screen door impatiently. "The flies is gittin' in."

Cuddy, her face white under her sun-bonnet, walked slowly out. Then, after a moment's hesitation, she passed quickly round the house, and up the steps of the shady veranda all comfortable with hammocks and cushions. A sense of her own poor clothing and awkwardness almost overwhelmed her,

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but she had too much at stake to give up now.

"Mrs. Ancel,"—her voice was low and soft,—“I do want my money to-day, if you please. You see, I was going next week to see my boy—”

“I told Gusta to tell you”—Mrs. Ancel did not lift her eyes from her sewing—“that I could *not* pay you for two weeks.”

There was no replying to Mrs. Ancel. Her voice had a definite “that’s all” in it.

Cuddy looked from the mother to her daughter. Muriel Ancel was a fine-looking girl of the Gibson type, with fluffy dark hair, magnetic dark eyes, and a smile of exceeding sweetness. She looked pityingly at the forlorn face and shabby appearance of the woman before her, but she did not speak.

For half a minute the widow waited, then she slowly went down the steps.

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Pausing on the lowest one, she turned her wistful race toward the two women. Mrs. Ancel was still sewing and did not see her, but Muriel caught the look and it went to her heart.

As the horse and wagon disappeared up the street Muriel said:

"Mamma, I wish you could have paid her. She looked so disappointed. Something in her face made me think of Harry as he looked once at the university when he had word that his mother was ill."

"Why, Muriel, what a foolish idea!" Mrs. Ancel could put a double measure of scorn into common words. "You must either be always thinking of your friend, or he must be very commonplace if every old truck-woman suggests his face to you."

"*Every* old truck-woman doesn't, and this one may really have needed her pay."

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"Oh, nonsense!" said Mrs. Ancel. "They live like kings and queens, these farmers do. They always have plenty, and to sell. Their wants are so few. Think of the cherries that woman had this year. The only trees in the county that didn't fail."

Mrs. Ancel forgot that trees that fail are as useful as debtors who will not pay.

Muriel made no reply. Somehow the woman in the rumpled blue calico did not look queenly to her, and the intense agonized expression of the eyes and mouth, under the gingham sun-bonnet, were not suggestive of a regal countenance.

"I have only fifty dollars just now," Mrs. Ancel went on; "forty of that is for your white dress for Commencement, and you want ten for flowers. Harry loves flowers." This last teasingly.

Muriel's face flushed deeply. She

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knew her mother's adoration for her. It was a selfish sort of mother-love; a love that shut out all needs but those of her own child, that denied her daughter nothing except the right to be generous.

The two women sewed on until the call to luncheon in the cool dining-room took them indoors. The mother's thoughts were busy with the dainty features of Muriel's beautiful white gown. But the blue eyes of a sorrow-smitten face kept coming up before Muriel's mind,—eyes that might easily have looked out of a handsome, scholarly countenance, so alike were they in color and expression to those of her college acquaintance. She tried to forget it, but all the rest of the day and far into the night the picture of the forlorn old woman with her grieved face and pleading eyes became a haunting memory.

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EVENING



HE low afternoon sun had slipped behind a bank of storm-clouds in the west, and the unusual heat of the day was waiting to be broken by a shower as Cuddy Perine's wagon rattled crazily over the country road on its homeward way.

"Never mind, Chet," she said soothingly to the old horse who had made two or three ineffectual attempts at trotting; "never mind; you needn't hurry,—nothin' matters now."

She tried to be calm, but her strength gave way and she sobbed bitterly.

"Oh, Father, help me to bear it." She was gripping the reins in her clenched hands. "I'm an old woman

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now, an' I feel things so. Pity me, Lord. I know I oughtn't mind. But he's all I've got, an' I'll never go to another Commencement. Why could n't she have paid me? I've allus just longed for schoolin' an' couldn't have it. Why couldn't I see my baby get his diploma? Nobody could be so proud of him as his Cuddy. Nobody else could care half so much."

They were at the top of Basher's Hill by this time. But the glory of the June morning had shifted to a hot, sullen evening. The sky was lead, the wind was blowing ominously out of the west, the trees were turning their leaves white side uppermost in token of coming trouble. The cattle were huddled together in the far corners of the pasture, and the smell of heat and dust filled the air.

"How unkind and unforgivin' the world looks when your heart's achin';

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an' this ain't the first time I've brought my troubles to this hilltop, Chet."

The horse had stopped on the top of the divide again, but this time he stood waiting in the middle of the road, while Cuddy's mind ran back over the vicarious way her years had led her.

"Why can't I set on a cool porch in a purty dress? I love purty things so. But *I* never git time to rest an' enjoy them. . . .

"Twenty-five years since me an' Joe Perine come to Kansas. Two little boys we had then, an' baby come 'fore they was hardly out of dresses. Seemed like I couldn't care for another little one, but I did. An' when Henry an' Richard both died of pneumony that cold winter, I couldn't 'a' lived without baby an' Joe. And then the big rains, an' the cloudburst in Grover township an' the awful rushin' water down the draw. Joe tryin' to save the cattle an'

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gettin' lost himself, an' only Cuddy an' Baby left. Then come the long years of hard work an' poor help an' debts an' crops failin'. And me workin' in the garden an' pickin' apples, an' bindin' wheat, an' pitchin' hay to save the price of a hand. . . . I've just starved for books an' pictures. Mebby that's why I allus stop here on this hill, rain or shine, an' look at the paintin' God made for such as me who never shall see the old masters. *He* is Master of the masters, I reckon, and He paints for poor souls hungry as I am for His beauty. . . .

"I've allus loved music, an' I'll go to my grave with an ache in my throat because I can't sing. And Baby sings so sweet. I milked four cows an' made an' sold butter all one winter to have him learn, the neighbors sayin' I was a fool, but I wasn't. Cuddy knew. His singin' in the Presbyterian church was

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where the money came from to help out when the alfalfa failed. An' he's to sing at Commencement."

She drew from her big calico pocket a dainty program wrapped in a clean handkerchief.

"It says, 'Vocal Solo, by Mr. Harold Perine.' I thought this mornin' I might show this to Mis' Ancel. . . .

"Many a night I've set up when I ought to 'a' slept, readin' everything I could get hold of so I'd be company for him; an' he calls me his chum. Through all these lonely years with him away at school I've fought my battle, lookin' for'ard always to the time when eddication should be his heritage,—an' I've won. He's strong in body an' mind an' soul. He's the best athlete in the field; he took class honors in his studies, an' he knows the Ten Commandments and lives 'em daily. . . .

"Well, look there, Chet—sunshine

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through that cloud, an' the storm gone up Deer Crick valley. Ain't that a glorious light on the alfalfa fields! Every purple blossom of it has been a friend to me in my fight. I've gone through so much I guess I can stand this little disappointment. The air's lots cooler. Basher's Hill's allus my place of benediction. *His* law descends to me here like it did to Moses on Mount Sinai, an' I go down obedient."

A look of patient resignation came into her eyes, and drawing up the reins, she passed slowly over the divide toward her plain home in the shelter of the woods by the creek.

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THE NEXT DAY



UDDY was sitting on her doorstep with her hands full of sweet peas. A vine of white honeysuckle over the trellis by the kitchen window filled the air with perfume. The level rays of the evening sun smote through the dip of the hill pasture and made a golden glamour about the treetops. As Cuddy lifted her eyes from the sweet varicolored blossoms to note the splendor of the sunset sky, a vision of nearer beauty shut out the glory beyond. A pink tulle hat with black plumes resting bewitchingly on dark hair, the dainty swish and sweep of pink dimity flounces, the fluffiness of a black chiffon boa with long hanging ends falling almost to the ruffles below, pink cheeks

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and soft dark eyes, and a perfect self-possession.

Poor Cuddy! She could meet city folks in a stiff quaint way at her front door, but coming unannounced into her back yard, she could only stand up in painful silence.

"Pardon me, Mrs. Perine." Muriel Ancel had a voice like her mother's, minus the metallic ring. "Mr. Basher brought papa a load of hay for our carriage horses this morning, and I asked him your name and where I could find you. I was so sorry mamma could not pay you yesterday, but I have ten dollars and I want you to have it. I was just going to spend it for flowers. Won't you take this much on mamma's account? What beautiful sweet peas!" she added as her eyes caught the pile of blooms that had fallen at Cuddy's feet.

"I think I oughtn't take it, Miss

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Ancel," said Cuddy hesitatingly. So long had she been the debtor to others that to be creditor came with an ill grace.

"Oh, yes, you ought," said Muriel gaily. "I know you need it, and I've driven all the way out here to bring it. I'm so sorry it isn't all we owe you."

"Well, you see," said Cuddy, twisting the gold-piece in her fingers apologetically, "you see my boy's to graduate next week, and I was just crazy to see him get his diploma." Again came the look into the blue eyes, so like to eyes that Muriel knew.

"Tell me all about it, Mrs. Perine."

Cuddy was only a poor, ignorant, timid woman, and Muriel the daughter of luxury and refinement; yet in the joy of sympathy the older woman took the younger to her heart. In the growing twilight they sat together, one talking, the other listening. And when the

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half-moon looking over the eastern treetops warned Muriel that she must leave, she was wiser than anyone else in this story, for she knew what the others were yet to find out.

"Let *me* call you Cuddy, too," she said, shyly holding the widow's toil-hardened hand in her own soft palms. Then a cordial good-night, and with her carriage and driver she disappeared in the shadows of the lane and left Cuddy looking only at gray mist and deepening gloom.

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COMMENCEMENT EVE



GLORY of moonlight on the university campus, through whose shadow-flecked ways young people were loitering. Merry voices from the group by the fountain in the open. Subdued tones from the shadier ways. The evening exercises had been briefer than usual in the auditorium, and the 10:30 bell had not yet sounded the call to the dormitories. Discipline always weakened through the very last days and nights of the year, and to the end of time college students who through many months will have a sympathetic oneness of interests, find in Commencement week a pleasure whose memory is like unto none of the other memories of life.

Down a winding walk where the

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moonbeams made only a pale, delicious gloom, two young people were strolling leisurely. College gossips had long since dubbed them the handsomest couple in school, and had fearlessly discussed their future. But the future was the one thing of which until tonight they themselves had not dared to talk.

"I know, Muriel," said the young man, looking down into the girl's face, "I know I have what should be a rare fortune to a poor boy: the offer of this Government position for the present, and a professional life with promise of success for the ambitious and diligent. And you would like me to lead such a life,"—how tender his voice was now!—"but, Muriel, I am going home to Cuddy and the farm,"—Muriel gave a little start,—“to my mother, I mean. I always call her Cuddy. I don't care to belong to the *people*. I love the

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common folks, and whatever talent I have I want to use it for the farmers, and the farm life I mean to live.

"I shall make every foot of that quarter-section pay for itself, and buy three quarters more some day. After-while I'm going to build, up on the west ridge where the earth and the fulness thereof spread out for miles and miles.

"I want to put into my mother's latter years some of the comfort and beauty and peace that have been denied her. She has lived a life of sacrifice for me. She has been my inspiration and my strength. She is only a plain, ignorant woman, and her grammar would shock you, Muriel, but she is the bravest, most unselfish, dearest Cuddy in the world. And sometime, if the girl I love can love her, too, I'll have two homes side by side on the west ridge,—one for Cuddy and one for my girl."

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Two weeks before, this would have chilled Muriel's heart, for a time at least. But she knew Harold Perine now in another light. For a space they walked in silence; then Harold spoke:

"Muriel, I guess I'm all right in Greek and trigonometry, and I'm first in electricity. I think my papers are all signed up for to-morrow, but I've never learned to say well what I must say now." His blue eyes were full of pleading and his face had a look that should come to a man only once in a lifetime.

Out of Muriel's mind had vanished all the selfish ideals of her mother's making, the love of extravagant, luxurious living, and the false standards of value.

"You needn't say it at all, Harry. I know it already." The girl's voice was as low as a whisper. What followed then belongs to the moonlight and the trees, and they never tell.

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COMMENCEMENT DAY



UDDY sat, half-dazed, in an obscure corner of the great university auditorium. She had been so from the moment she had alighted from the train at the railway station amid the cries of half a dozen hackmen and the college yells of over a hundred freshmen and sophomores.

Harold, who knew nothing of her coming, was locked up with the other seniors, waiting to be called to the opening of the exercises, and Cuddy would have been utterly bewildered had not Muriel Ancel rescued her from the crowd on the platform and taken her in a carriage to the college buildings. Here the girl left her with

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instruction to an usher to give her a good seat.

"She looks purtier in that blue-an'-white gingham than she did in the pink dimity," had been Cuddy's only mental observation, but an impression was growing in her mind that she herself was entirely out of place; that the plain, poorly dressed country-woman had no part in that gay assembly; and that Harry would be ashamed of her.

Muriel had rushed off to her own room to put on the beautiful dress, to purchase which her mother had denied Cuddy her due. Cuddy's ten dollars had only paid her railroad fare, and the new dress she had hoped for herself she was forced to do without. So she sat very still in her corner, hoping that few people would notice her.

And now Harold was to sing, and Muriel in a dream of soft white draperies and laces came forward to play

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his accompaniment. There was no mistaking the genuineness of the applause that greeted the couple. Harold Perine was beloved by the whole school. His had been the battle of every poor young student, and he had fought his way foot by foot. But his bright mind, his genial nature and his intrinsic manhood had won him friends even among the scatter-brained young fellows who rarely set its true value on anything.

Cuddy, forgetting everything else in the world, listened to the song and the cheering that followed it. Then came the regulation class address, other music, the presentation of diplomas, the short personal congratulation and approval by which the president distinguished her boy as he stood there before the faculty, the school and the visitors, the recognized king of his kind.

"I'm so glad," murmured Cuddy,

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"that I didn't take any of that alfalfa-money. Harry needed it all for that suit. Why should I care for myself if Mrs. Ancel didn't pay me?"

But a sense of her own shabbiness grew upon her.

"I won't let Baby see me," she said. "The train goes at three-twenty an' I'll just slip away an' go home. Bash-er's Jim'll meet me at the station. Dear, dear Baby, I've seen you graduate at last, the Lord be praised. I won't make you ashamed of me."

A crash of music from the orchestra, the loud hand-clapping, the swarming up of the audience, and Commencement was over.

Cuddy, again bewildered by the crowd, stood waiting the chance to slip away. She thought every soul there must have noticed her, and her one wish now was not to mar Harry's success nor make him feel embarrassment.

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As she was avoiding a particularly dense crush she found herself suddenly thrust into a hand-shaking group whose central figure was her own handsome son.

For just one instant a flush rose to his cheek (he was only human) as the awkward, homely little woman in her plain old-fashioned clothes stood before him. Then came the swift recollection of all the sacrificial life she had lived for him, all the pleasure and success she had made possible for him, the degree of his uplifting marked by her lack, and he flung his arms about her and kissed her again and again.

"Cuddy, my Cuddy, you are the best mother in the world! Where did you come from? It's just like you to surprise me. Here, good people," turning to his companions, "this is my mother, but she's more than a mother, —she's my Madonna."

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Then the earth slipped out from under Cuddy's feet, and the heavens came down about her as they never could have done on Basher's Hill.

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LONG AFTERWARD



PERINECROFT is one of the best managed farms in all Kansas. Its thousand acres of rich river-bottom and sloping grazing-lands, its herds of fine cattle and thoroughbred horses, its loaded granaries and wide-flung barns, its well-kept orchards and gardens, the artistic beauty and comfort of its farmhouse and grounds, show everywhere the unmistakable hand of skill, and the spirit of thrift and taste.

Young Ancel Perine, just home from Yale, is learning the management of the affairs, and with his mother, now grown matronly but still fair, he is something of a guardian to his younger brother and sister. For his father is

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more and more in demand in public life.

Harold Perine has fulfilled his promise made on that moonlit Commencement eve long ago. The quarter of a section that Cuddy had struggled so hard to save he has made to yield of its increase, and every acre has gathered to itself other acres until the farm is enlarged to six-fold its former size.

The home at Perinecroft stands on the brow of the west ridge, a very model of modest country luxury. Wide halls, airy rooms, cozy nooks, broad verandas, and vines and flowers, sunny spaces and sheltered ways,—an ideal place where the heart may take its ease, and life may move serenely onward.

With his growing fortune, Harold found time to be the helper and arbitrator for the whole neighborhood. Then the State Legislature had need

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of him; and now the National Government, where a few of the office-hunted as well as the office-hunting always are, finds in the son of a poor farmer's widow one of the men that are the stay and strength of empire.

And what of Cuddy? Through her eastern windows she looks upon the misty glory of sunrise, and before her wide veranda the whole landscape unrolls in its ineffable richness. Obscure, and unknown to fame, yet strong and useful in the life she has given to others, well has she run the race set before her.

And when the sunset skies are one magnificent splendor of crimson and gold, when all the earth is radiantly green and all the air a shimmer of light, when the soft gray shadows of evening are unfolding to eastward, and the purple mist like a sweet amethyst crown presses gently down on the far-

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off brow of the landscape, Cuddy, who through so many long years lifted up her eyes unto the hills from whence came her help, sits now in the serene sunset of her own day, fearing not the shadows of her night so soon to fall, for that her morning will be upon the hilltops of heaven.

Christmas Eve in the Day Coach



THE train on the Rock Island road was late in leaving Kansas City. It had lost time all the way from Chicago. It had plowed through heavy snows in Illinois, a wreck had delayed it in Iowa, and a broken bridge just out of Kansas City had cut off its gain on a smooth track. As the conductor waved the starting signal and stepped inside the vestibule he looked at his watch.

"This *is* a run," he muttered. "Ten hours late and the ugliest blizzard growling up in the northwest that ever blew out of British Columbia. We'll eat Christmas turkey tomorrow at the Kanorado café if we don't get stuck in a drift in the Solomon river country.

CHRISTMAS EVE

How about it, Dixey?" This last to the colored porter from one of the Pullman sleepers. "Don't look like a very 'Merry Christmas' for us, does it?"

"No, suh," replied Dixey, with a grin. "Got a lot of fellow-sufferers back in the *Amarantha* who are furious about this delay. Yes, suh."

Here a brakeman joined the two.

"How is it with your folks, Mac?" asked the conductor.

"Oh, the day-coach crowd is all right. Carries its lunch in a shoe-box and takes what Providence sends. That's what your *Amarantha* crowd and all the rest had better do. Number seventy-one is a fine old engine, but she's got a pull to get this train to Denver. There's trouble mixing in the sky as sure as smoke."

Mac passed on, slamming the car door after him. The train shook itself

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clear of sidetracks and quickened its speed as it swung up the Kaw river valley. Two mail cars, two baggage cars, a smoker, a day coach, two chair cars, three sleepers and a dining-car made up the engine's burden. The wind was in its teeth, the mercury was settling, and the gray sky seemed to flatten down to the very earth in a pall of thick, bitter air.

Of all seasons, people like least to be belated at Christmas-time. Today, from the smoker to the diner, there was an atmosphere of unseasonable disappointment and discontent. In the *Amarantha*, Dixey's special charge, a man of fifty years sat alone looking savagely out at the landscape whirling by. He was a rich mine-owner from Denver, whose business had called him to the East, and he was hurrying home for business reasons again. Less than three days before a telegram had in-

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formed him of a matter demanding his speedy return to Denver. It read:

"The options hold till the twenty-fourth. You can save a half-million if you get here by that time. Frisbey."

True, he was already a more than one-time millionaire, but that five hundred thousand was too much to lose just for lack of a few hours' time. It was already the forenoon of the twenty-fourth.

"We'll not get out of Kansas till it's Christmas as sure as my name is John Carden," he muttered to himself, and fidgeted restlessly in his comfortable berth. "To think of spending ten extra hours in a Pullman when every hour is worth fifty thousand dollars to me. I'm born to ill luck."

He rose and paced up and down the aisle, frowning on the world in general and the passengers of the *Amarantha* in

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particular. At the end of the car he glared at Dixey, who courteously held the door open for him to pass out.

"You needn't go hunting your peace of mind in the day coach, no, suh," said Dixey to himself, with a grin. "The folks have troubles of their own clear up to the cow-catcher. Yes, suh. If the old man didn't pack up his happiness in his own grip, it's back in Chicago. It ain't on this train, suah." Dixey sat down by the window to watch the first flakes of snow that were beginning to sail out of the northwest.

In the middle of the day coach John Carden found an empty seat.

"I suppose I'll soon be riding in a box-car," he said to himself. "Fifty thousand dollars an hour! Nobody on this train is so unfortunate as I am." He gave no thought to the three or four millions still his own, but only to the sum he was losing.

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Just across the aisle from him sat a forlorn little group of four children. The oldest, a girl of eight years, was trying to mother the other three—twin boys of six and a little mite of four. They were traveling alone. The conductor into whose hands they had been placed at Kansas City had transferred them to Mac, the brakeman, to look after.

The train whirled on toward the west. The *Amarantha* people took dinner in the dining car. The day-coach folk ate lunch from their "shoe-boxes" and the gray afternoon dragged dismally on. In a long run between two stops Mac remembered the children. So he came and sat down with them and in a free, kindly manner drew their story from them.

"We're all by ourselves," said Sallie, the eldest. "Our mamma's dead and papa was killed last week."

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"I'm an orphans," piped up Bennie, one of the twins. "That's what Mr. Brown said, and patted me on the head, he did, and said 'Poor little orphans!'"

"I'm an orphans, too," put in Teddy, the other boy.

"I is too," echoed little Jennie.

"We're all orphans," said Sallie, "and we are going to Aunt Jane's, out near Kanorado. Mr. Brown, that took care of us after papa was killed, he wrote to Aunt Jane and said he'd send us to her for a Christmas present. We think she will met us at Kanorado. Are we most there, Mister?"

"Not yet," replied Mac.

"We never saw Aunt Jane," Sallie went on. "She wrote to Mr. Brown she didn't have much for us but love. She had two childrens and they both died, so she hasn't anybody to hang up their stockings on Christmas eve.

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Don't you think she will meet us at Kanorado?"

"Yes, I'm sure she will," said Mac.

Just then the whistle sounded and the brakeman hurried to his post. He meant to come back at once, but his duties interfered and it was dark before he thought of the children again.

Meanwhile the speed of the train had slackened. It was out in the open prairie now, in what is called "the Short-grass Country," and the storm was upon it in all the frozen fury of a western blizzard. The engine strained and groaned as it labored to find the rails and keep its wheels gripped to them. The light had faded and the snow and sleet beat upon the ice-coated windows and shut out the twilight landscape.

Across the aisle from the orphans John Carden, the millionaire, tired of his own unpleasant thoughts, had lis-

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tened half-consciously to the brakeman's talk and theirs. When Sallie had declared that "Aunt Jane hadn't much for them but love," he said to himself contemptuously:

"That's the same as nothing. They'd better be in an orphan asylum."

But he was really not a hard-hearted man, and he soon found himself watching the children and listening to their prattle. At the first call for supper he went back to the dining-car and ate a sumptuous meal. But he did not stop in the *Amarantha* afterward. Instead, he sauntered forward to the day coach and dropped into his seat again, just in time to hear the conductor up the aisle say:

"We've made a mile in the last eight minutes. The engine will be dead in half an hour. It's an awful storm."

Carden glanced at the children. They were just putting away a crust or two

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in their "shoe-box." Evidently Mr. Brown, who had sent them on their journey, had not taken into consideration either the possibility of a belated train, or the appetites of four growing children. The younger ones were begging for more, but provident little Sallie said:

"We may get hungry before we get to Aunt Jane's."

"And you can't eat *love*, then," muttered the millionaire across the aisle. But suddenly he thought of his own full supper, and the pity he had lavished on himself all the afternoon began to be transferred to these fatherless, motherless little ones.

"Are you hungry?" he asked them.

"N—no, sir," said Sallie, timidly.

"I am," said Bennie, stoutly.

The other two children looked an agreement with Bennie and kept silent. The train-boy was just passing.

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"Here, youngster," said Carden. "Give me a dozen bananas for these children."

They thanked him eagerly and the fifty-thousand-an-hour loss seemed to slip out of his mind as he watched them eat the fruit. As the train-boy handed back the change, he said to Carden:

"Notice we ain't hardly moving? We'll stay here till Christmas. You can just count on that."

"What did he mean, Mister?" queried Sallie, with a serious face.

"Why, we are snowed in and the train can't move till tomorrow."

"But will we *sleep* here?" she asked.

"I think we are in for it," said John Carden, with one last bitter thought of the lost half-million. "But we'll make the best of it," he added, cheerfully.

Here Mac, looking over the train-boy's shoulder, saw the children making

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friends with the Pullman passenger and went on his way. In the *Amarantha* he said to Dixey:

"We've got one of your birds in our cage. Don't disturb him. He's helping me out."

"Yes, suh. He's a born helpeh, he is," and Dixey showed his teeth in a broad smile.

While the reality of a train frozen fast in a blizzard was dawning upon the passengers in the various compartments, the four orphans were preparing for their first Christmas eve alone. They knew nothing as yet of the discomfort and suffering possible to an ice-locked train, and in their childish innocence they thought only of the bedtime custom of their own lost home and of the coming of Santa Claus.

As John Carden watched them he noted that their clothing, though plain and scanty, was neat and clean, and

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that their gentle behavior must have been the result of a careful home-training.

The car, which had been overheated, was cooling rapidly now, for the supply of coal had suddenly become precious. The children felt the change and began to shiver in their thin little jackets.

"Why don't we go to Aunt Jane's, Sallie?" demanded Bennie.

"'Cause the train's snowed up," said his sister, "and we have to stay here all night."

"Will Santa Claus come *here*, Sallie?" Freddy looked very serious.

"'Course he will," put in Bennie. "He goes everywhere. Don't he, Sallie?"

"Will we hang our stockings by the window? There isn't any chimney, is there, Sallie? And will we have to go to sleep before he comes?" Teddy

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was getting anxious, but Sallie quieted him.

"Of course, Teddy, we'll hang up our stockings. Santa knows how to find them just as well as he did at home, and we must say our prayers, too, just as if"—her lip quivered—"as if papa and mamma were here."

"And sing our hymn, too?"—this from Bennie.

"And say our 'postles' creed, too?"—this from Teddy.

"I'se told," said Jennie, tugging at her shoe.

"What are you taking off your shoe for, then?" asked the millionaire.

"To hang up my tottin'," replied the child.

Carden watched Sallie fasten the four stockings to the bundle-rack overhead and tuck an old shawl she had taken from their grip, about the laps of the four as they sat each with a bare

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foot drawn up like so many chickens in the snow. A little while they chattered of Christmas and what each wished for. Then in clear, childish voices they sang together the evening hymn they had been taught in the vanished home :

“Abide with me! Fast falls the eventide,
The darkness deepens—Lord, with me abide!
When other helpers fail, and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, O, abide with me!”

Over the rich man's soul there swept the memory of a Methodist home and the daily prayers of a sainted father and the dear old hymns from the well-worn hymnal. Other passengers than John Carden were watching and listening now, forgetful of the growing chill and their hunger. A spirit of reverence kept them quiet while the children, unconscious of being noticed, sang the verses through. And when, all together, they began the sacred words of the

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Apostles' Creed, "*I believe in God, the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth,*" the tears welled up to many eyes. There was something so strangely pathetic in the scene.

"I want to say my prayers," said sleepy Ted, and, kneeling at Sallie's knee, he repeated the sweet evening prayer of all Christendom. Then Bennie knelt, and in her turn little Jennie lisped her petition. But when she reached the third line her cold, bare, little foot made her vary her prayer :

"If I should — 'feeze to def' — before I wate,
I pway the Lord my soul to tate,
An' this I ast for Jesus' sate,"

she murmured, trustfully. Something rose in John Carden's throat and a blur came before his eyes.

"Who will you say your 'now-I-lay-me' to, Sallie?" asked Bennie.

Sallie was at a loss. Then, looking across the aisle, she said, timidly :

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"May I say it to you, Mister?" and in a moment she had knelt on the floor and hid her face on his knee. The lost half-million was very far from his thoughts now. When she lifted her face he stooped and kissed her, and in a gentle voice he bade her go to sleep like a good girl.

Sallie smiled up at him. In a few minutes the four children were in the sound slumber that even a cold day coach cannot drive away at first effort. For a full hour the millionaire sat watching the orphans, and the littleness, the grasping selfishness that had seemed a part of him, slipped off like a garment. A Christian manhood was asserting its need in him, and the "peace on earth, and goodwill to men" was becoming a part of his peace and his goodwill.

Meanwhile the storm outside grew more furious; the wind beat merci-

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lessly upon the helpless train, and the snow swirled about in an icy frenzy. The cars grew more dismal. Each crevice about the windows let in a freezing current of air and the night settled down, black and relentless. It was Christmas eve, but only the four little ones with their stockings swaying overhead gave any suggestion of the coming of the sacred holiday. Even well-dressed, well-fed John Carden was beginning to feel the discomfort. Just then Dixey touched his shoulder.

"Have your berth made up?"

"Yes, and—Dixey—leave the upper berth shut up—I have the whole section—and let me know when it's ready." He slipped a silver dollar into the porter's hand. "Now grease your heels and get it done."

Dixey grinned and hurried back to the *Amarantha*. In a few minutes he returned to the day coach.

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"Berth's all ready, suh," he announced.

"Well, take that little girl. I'll give you a quarter if you don't wake her, and put her in my berth."

Mac was standing behind Carden.

"So you are going to look after them? Much obliged to you. My hands are full."

"Yes, they'll not freeze if I can help it," said Carden, and tenderly as a mother might do, he bore the sleeping Jennie to his own warm berth. Another trip and he and Dixey had the twin boys tucked in at the sisters' feet, and the blankets wrapped them in a cozy nest.

"Here's your fee for not waking them, Dixey. Don't they look comfortable?" His eyes beamed as he looked at them.

Dixey's hand closed on a second silver dollar.

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"Thank you, suh!" and he added to himself: "You did find your peace of mind in the day coach, after all, didn't you?"

Carden was not through with the porter yet.

"We must get those stockings in here and get them filled, Dixey."

Dixey hastened after the four limp stockings and hung them overhead.

"Now we'll hold up the train," said Carden, joyously. "Those things must be filled, you know. You take the Pullmans. The brakeman and I can manage the rest."

When Christmas morning dawned the blizzard had whirled off somewhere into the east and a glorious Kansas sunshine filled the landscape with glittering splendor. The air was as sharp as splintered glass, but warmer hours could not be very far away.

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When the children awoke they thought they were still dreaming, so unreal was this luxurious berth to them. But when they caught sight of their day-coach friend they sat up in amazed delight. And he looked as happy as they.

"You never heard old Santa's sleigh on the roof, and you didn't see him when he brought you in here," he said, as he watched them unload their stores of gifts with little shrieks of joy. And no wonder they shrieked. The train-boy had brought apples and bananas and candy. The passengers had ransacked their grips for toys and books intended for little ones whom they would not see for many hours. The conductor, who had twin boys in Denver, turned in two warm little overcoats for Teddy and Bennie; while the baggageman sent back two lovely

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dolls from his own Christmas purchases.

"There's as good dolls in Denver as you can buy in Chicago," he declared. "We'll learn to trade at our home stores sometime, I reckon."

Sallie could not help wondering why the passengers should all take to visiting the *Amarantha* passengers this morning, nor why so many should pause at their berth to say: "Merry Christmas," and that everybody seemed so happy when they were all fast-bound by the blizzard's handiwork. But Jennie and Teddy and Bennie gave no thought to anything besides their present joy.

It was a vastly uncomfortable day, however, and only the goodwill that filled the hearts of the imprisoned travelers could have made all the cars ring with Christmas song and have shared

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up equally the comforts of food and warmth the train afforded.

Late in the afternoon Number Seventy-one crept into Kanorado with its burden, towed by a big mountain engine. On the station's platform a strong, middle-aged woman waited. Her face was browned by many summers on the plains, but a loving mother-heart looked out of her eyes, and a sweet smile was on her lips. She was the "Aunt Jane" to whom the motherless, fatherless little ones were sent.

John Carden almost missed his train, he lingered so long helping to tuck the children into the warm bedquilts of the sleigh that fairly smoked with jugs of hot water. Finally he kissed them all good-by, and into each little fist he slipped a gold coin before he caught the railing of the rear Pullman just getting away. It took Dixey some

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time to find him here and give him the telegram received for him at Kanorado. It read:

"To John Carden,

*Berth 8, Amarantha, No. 544, Rock
Island Train No. 721.*

*Options will be open till the 29th.
You are safe. Frisbey."*

Little Red Head

"Trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home."—*Wordsworth.*

The great trestle on the Monon Air Line is more than a hundred feet above the valley it spans. At the farther end is the river, a beautiful, picturesque stream at all seasons of the year. Then the bottom-land widens out to the hither bluff that rises as abruptly as the river-bank opposite. It was a daring piece of engineering that thrust those two steel lines of railway through the air from bluff to bluff sheer above the river, bottom-land and all. But the Monon must be an air line, so it drove its roadbed straight to the north-northwest, whether that roadbed rested on the solid rock of the geologic outcrop or the soft marshy muck of the Kankakee, or hung in the air on the "big trestle," as it came to be known.

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Where the bridge-end climbs up into the firm ground north of the river the masonry is secure and its foundation certain. But the south limit of the trestle had always need for a danger signal. Here the soft, yielding hillside gave only an insecure footing for a roadway. A treacherous, shifting height, given to landslides and much to be guarded against in the season when the frost is leaving the ground. More than once in its history the road had slipped awry, and terrible disasters had barely been averted. And once the disaster came—a memorable wreck, a derailed train, the engineer under the engine, the fireman scalded to death, and the smoking-car burned with many victims sacrificed inside it.

The memory of the event did not fade out of the annals of the road nor the minds of the country-folk on the bottom farms nor back among the hills.

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Trains always crept slowly out on the big trestle, and even the Monon flier caught its breath in great sobs as it quickened its speed and put on pressure when it had cleared the narrow, timbered-up piece of danger and fled away toward Indianapolis with loosened tension and a freer spirit.

Just around the bend of the hill little Red Head lived in a modest farm-house. His father's farm in the upland was not very productive, and the work of fertilizing and cultivating it was more than one man, however industrious, could make worth the effort. Little Red Head's real name was Joseph. His father, who loved him tenderly, called him "Joey, dear." His mother called him "Little Sweet Heart." But Uncle Joe called him "Red Head" because Uncle Joe liked to tease him, and because his hair was a ruddy auburn. He was only four, and he had the baby

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pink still on his cheeks and the baby trust in his big brown eyes.

"Hello, little Red Head," Uncle Joe was wont to say; "you could flag a train with that head of yours, you could. You'd stop the Monon flier on the big trestle with that little clover-top. If ever you see a train in danger just get in front of it and turn your back and it will stop all right as soon as the engineer sees that hair."

Very foolish talk all this was to a child, and yet such foolishness comes often from heedless grown people who never study the heart of a child. Uncle Joe did not think of how often the story of the wreck five years before had been recited in little Red Head's hearing, nor did he know how the child's mind went back to it every time he heard a train whistle "down brakes" for the big trestle.

Winter was slipping into spring. Life

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had not been easy in that little farmhouse that year. Grandfather, for whom Uncle Joe and little Joseph were named, had lingered through a long illness in the fall, and died just at Christmas-time. Then the father, weakened by much caring for the sick, fell ill. He came up from the sick-bed at last, however, to face financial troubles. Doctor bills and multiplied debts filled the days with worry. No little foxes ever gnaw the vines like the foxes of debt. It is not like sickness nor disgrace to bear, but it can by persistent continuance be a hundred-fold more wearing on nervous force.

Easter eve settled down with a black April sky shot through with lightning. Inside the little farm-house the story of the wreck was re-told. How on such a threatening night the soft south bluff had given way and sent the train to its doom. Little Red Head's eyes grew

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big as the story went on, until his mother saw and understood.

"Come, Sweet Heart," she said, "You must go to bed so the bunnies will lay pretty Easter eggs for you. You'll want to get up early and hunt them all around in the morning."

"How far awound, Mamma?" asked Red Head.

"O, clear around the hill," replied his mother. She hardly thought of what she was saying, for her heart was so full of anxiety about doctor bills and grocery bills, that her mother-love was not quite as prudent of words as was its wont.

The baby-boy was soon tucked into bed. The storm beat heavily upon the house. The grown people fell to discussing the family care, the dark prospect, with money needed and no way to get it. True, the sum was not large, \$500; but Dr. Dale, the family physi-

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cian, was a better practitioner than a philanthropist, and his practice had made him the owner of more than one farm in this river valley. And now he was about to close upon this upland ground and add another tenant where before had been a freeholder. The outlook was as gloomy as the storm-threshed April sky on that dark night. And yet some comfort came in when at bedtime the father opened the family Bible and read the sweet promises of the 91st Psalm:

“He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

“I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress; my God; in Him will I trust.

“Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence.

“He shall cover thee with His feath-

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ers, and under His wings shalt thou trust; His truth shall be thy shield and buckler."

When his mother went to leave a good-night kiss on her little one's face her own cheeks were wet with tears. Little Red Head was still awake, and he stroked her tear-wet face with his chubby hands.

"What for you cwy so, Mamma?" he asked.

"O, mother is worried so about where to get money to pay Dr. Dale next week. But never mind, Sweet Heart. Go to sleep now and slip out early to hunt the bunny nests in the morning," kissing him softly as she spoke.

"Dood-night, Mamma. I'll slip away wite early. And say, Mamma, don't cwy. 'He shall cover me wiv His fevvers.' I heard papa read it. Maybe He'll cover mamma and me. Dood-night."

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He tucked a dimpled cheek into his little pink palm and fell asleep.

Easter morning broke with the glory of a Resurrection dawn. The April storm had fled away and all the rain-washed land lay moist and budding, awaiting the warmth of full-grown day. Little Red Head was the first to waken. He rose and crept softly out into the kitchen, his big brown eyes full of childish curiosity as he peered about for Easter eggs. Presently Uncle Joe came sleepily out and started for his early milking.

"Hello, Red Head," he said; "hunt-in' for rabbits' eggs? You'd better look in the garden."

"Help me det my clothes on, Uncle Joe, and I'll do hunt," said Red Head.

Big Joe helped him to stuff his pink nightgown shirtwise into his little blue overalls and to tie his shoes on his

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stockingless feet. Then giving him a hug, he said,

"Run along, now, and bring Uncle Joe a hatful."

"I ain't dot no hat," said Red Head as he trotted out.

A rush of fowls from the chicken-yard greeted him.

"I ain't mamma, chickies; I tan't feed you, an' I want pwetty bunny eggs, not old white hen eggs," he chattered to them. And then he remembered the reading of the night before. "He shall cover me wiv His fevvers," he murmured softly.

All about the garden went little Red Head, his pink nightgown and blue overalls vivid enough in color for any Easter decoration. But no rabbit-nests could he find. His heart was getting heavy, but remembering his mother's words to look "all around," he climbed a low place in the fence and started

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across the pasture-lot toward the hill.

It was a glorious Sabbath morning, with the peace of God in the air and the rain-washed landscape aglow with verdure. The little boy was just tall enough to look through the third crack in the rail fence; so he could not see the river nor the bottom-lands half flooded by the cloudburst of the night before. Childlike he toddled on, talking to himself and wondering why he found no eggs, and now and then the words came unbidden, "He shall cover me wiv His fevvers."

He rounded the hill, and there before him hung a stretch of railroad track, the rails and ties from which the earth had slid clean away, leaving it ready to crush down with the first weight upon it. The treacherous bluff had given way once more, but this time it left no crooked track to give warning.

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From the farther end of the trestle no one could have detected the danger nor guessed that thirty feet of the road hung unsupported at the edge of the bluff.

Little Red Head looked curiously at the break in the earth; then his brown eyes opened wider. Suddenly the meaning of it all came over him. He was only four, but too often had he heard the story of the big wreck not to know how it had happened. He turned to run home to tell his mamma all about it when faint but clear through the morning air came the long whistle of the Monon flier bearing down upon the little village a few miles north of the river. It was only a flag station and the flier never stopped there. Into the heart of the child came that wisdom the things of the earth can never bestow. He turned his face to the trestle.

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"I've dot to be doin' sompin wite away," he murmured, and without a moment's delay he began to make his way along the uncertain timbering. His weight had no effect upon the air-hung rails. The ties were not close together and there was danger of the child's falling between them. It must have been the unseen hand of his guardian angel that guided him safely out almost one-third of the way across the big trestle as the train came thundering out upon the farther end of it. Little Red Head stood up bravely, his eyes looking straight to the south. Uncle Joe had said it made folks dizzy to look down. And down upon him, with an unusual rate for the trestle, came the huge train. A helpless little patch of color, blue overalls and pink shirt, his auburn hair all curly and wet with the morning mist, too innocent to know fear, he was there

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to flag the train in danger, just as Uncle Joe had so often told him he must do.

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Old Mrs. Ulbach's eating-house in Chicago was unusually crowded, even for Saturday evening, and Mrs. Ulbach and her fat, red-cheeked, tow-headed Dutch help were busy as flies,—the former in shoving meal tickets and bills into the money-drawer and handing out change; the latter in hurrying to and from the greasy-smelling kitchen to the dining-room and lunch-counter. At last the supper rush was over. Only three patrons remained. Two of them were, by their uniform, railroad men; the third a flashily dressed Jew.

As the two came from the lunch-counter toward the proprietor's desk, the face of one was beaming with smiles and blushes, while his companion looked at him good-humoredly.

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"What's de matter? You got goot news I don't know," said good-souled Mrs. Ulbach.

"You can bet he has, Mother Ulbach," replied the companion. "Just got a telegram from Indianapolis. He's a father now,—ten-pound boy, you know."

"Concratulations, Mister Hamer, concratulations," said Mrs. Ulbach, her Dutch face aglow, "and here,"—she looked at the money-drawer hesitatingly. Money meant much to her. A moment, and her face broke up into a broad grinning cheeriness.

"Here," she said; "tomorrow Easter. You take dese"—a tiny basket of gay china Easter eggs—"you take dese, and gif dem to dat boy."

"Oh, he's too little, Mrs. Ulbach—only six hours old," said the young father sheepishly.

"It make no different. Take 'em

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anyway. Gif dem to some older little poy for lofe of him. You take 'em," insisted the good woman.

"Yes, take 'em along, Hamer," echoed his companion. "You can throw 'em overboard on the big trestle if you want to," he added under his breath.

As the two left the desk the Jew handed up his lunch check.

"I hope he gifs dem to some child. I lofe de children."

"You not lofe Easter, do you?" queried Mrs. Ulbach jokingly.

"Bah! no," replied the Jew disgustedly. "But I lofe children," he repeated as he handed up a fat paper bill for change, and trotted out into the noisy Chicago thoroughfare.

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The Monon flier was some hours late on that Easter morning. A washout this side of the Kankakee river had de-

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layed it, and the engineer was over-eager to make up for lost time.

Simon Abrahamson, Hebrew, sat in his Pullman berth watching the pink morning light, and the mad Indiana landscape forever rushing to get behind him.

"Hello, Johnston," to the conductor, who dropped in beside him. "We makin' up some time, yet. We not get to Indianapolis any too soon, no?"

Abrahamson had large stores in Cincinnati and branch houses in Indianapolis and Terre Haute.

"Yes," said Johnston, "we got stuck, up beyond Rensselaer, and lost time. Hamer's on the engine and he got a wire at Chicago that there's a baby-boy just got to Indianapolis yesterday noon. It's his first, you know, and the man's wild to get home. Shouldn't be surprised if we cleared the big trestle at one jump the way we're goin'

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now. It's Easter, too,—kind of extry Sunday."

"Easter nodinks to me. I do more pizness Easter in Indianapolis tan any oder day. Your Easter, it all show. It mean you no good, too—bah! I lofe de children. I not blame de engineer. I lofe de children. But your Easter, it mean nodinks."

"Oh, yes, it does, Simon. The Lord loved little children, too. Hamer'll make it mean something. He's afraid his wife's not so well. Gee! but ain't we goin' to slow up for the trestle? There was a train here five years ago—but I'll tell you that after we get across. I'm all goose-flesh on this blamed old trestle, anyhow."

Up in the engineer's cab Hamer was driving a full head of steam. In his inner pocket next his heart lay a telegram which read:

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"Ten-pound boy born at noon. Mary not well. Come."

Every now and then the engineer pressed that paper message with his grimy left hand. Joy and anxiety mingled in his mind, and drove out for the time the prudence that made him one of the most trusted men on the road. The delay of the night had racked him, and now for the first time he came to this river-bank unmindful for the moment of the ever-present need for precaution. As the train whirled on its way a wild notion of taking that trestle at a mad rush seized him. Only the week before the road had been thoroughly inspected, and the report, "Never safer," he had seen himself.

And yet mechanically he called for a slower speed as the wooded river-bluff slipped behind him and the two

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steel rails lay like two silver cables above the mist-filled valley below. Not the speed, however, with which he was wont to creep across this never-to-be-trusted structure. Until suddenly a cry, a wild shriek of the terrified engine, called for "down brakes," and horror was in every quaver of the scream that went up and down the valley. The farmers heard it in the bottom-land round the bend of the river. Uncle Joe in the back pasture after the colts felt its thrill, and for no reason at all little Red Head came into his mind, and he called,

"Joey, oh, Joey! Where's Uncle Joe's baby-boy?"

Upon the trestle Hamer's keen eye had caught the gleam of pink and blue color. A moment, and the horror of what was about to be, brought that train to a stop that made the whole trestle quiver. Out before it in the

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middle of the track stood a mite of a boy in blue overalls and pink shirt.

"What the saints!" cried Johnston leaping up from Abrahamson's side and rushing to the door. The Jew followed, and behind them came the other passengers.

Out on the trestle Hamer sat holding a dear little red-headed boy in his arms. Before them yawned the new-made peril, and the disaster that had not been seemed almost as terrible as if it had really come to pass.

"Uncle Joe told me I tould stop a twain wiv my wed hair," little Red Head was saying. Hamer, white as a corpse, with tears streaming down his cheeks, held the boy close to his heart as though he were the new baby down at Indianapolis. The passengers gathered round in awed silence; only the engine puffed heavily, flinging its folds of somber smoke like mourning-

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veils down on the sweet, mist-wreathed valley shimmering in the iridescent morning sunlight.

"You tum out pwetty fast on the twestle," said the boy, "but I knowed you'd stop when you saw me."

"Say, youngster, weren't you afraid?" The question seemed to come from all at once.

"No," said the little one with innocent simplicity, "I wasn't afwaid."

"Why not?" asked Simon Abrahamson.

"Betause, I ist snuggled wite up clost to Dod. 'He covered me wiv His fevvers,' I dess."

The April air seemed full of a holy benediction as the passengers looked into each other's eyes.

"Say, little—Red Head—what's your name?" asked the conductor.

"Wed Head, Uncle Joe says. He

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told me I tould stop a twain. *He* was the one who said that."

"Little boy, what would you like to have more than anything else?" The man who asked the question had his hand in his pocket.

"Yes, tell us," echoed the others.

The child thought a moment.

"I wanted some bunny eggs for Easter," he said, "an' I touldn't find any. But—"

He hesitated a moment. Then the unselfishness that is in the heart of every child looked out of his eyes.

"Mamma cwied last night because Doctor Dale has dot a morjig, or sompin, on papa, an' he's doin' to tate our farm. An' papa wants \$500. An' I dess I want it too, more'n I want bunny eggs."

Simon Abrahamson had sat down on the trestle's edge and was swinging his feet against the timbers. At Red

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Head's words he drew out a long, slender check-book and fountain pen and began to write diligently. Then taking off his shiny silk tile and laying the check marked \$500 in the bottom, he handed it to the others present, saying,

"I lofe de children."

The dollars rattled merrily upon the check until the engineer was reached. Then Johnston, the conductor, spoke:

"Let Hamer save his money for his own kid. Say, Hamer, get those china eggs old Mrs. Ulbach at the eating-house in Chicago gave you for that baby-boy when you got that telegram yesterday. They're real rabbits' eggs," turning to the child, "and he's got 'em for you. I love children, too, Abrahamson, and I guess the Lord of Easter loves 'em, seein' how He's cared for this little one."

No Easter morning ever brought such

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surprise and joy and deep heartfelt thanksgiving into the farm-house as this April Sabbath when little Red Head and a grimy engineer and a blue-uniformed conductor and a richly dressed Jew came suddenly into the kitchen and told the strange story of childish trust and innocence of danger, to the bewildered father and mother.

When the doctor, whose claim had caused such anxiety, heard the story, he declared it was worth half the debt to be the physician for the father of such a boy. So he cut his claim in two. And to all that country neighborhood on that Easter day the preacher's hastily prepared sermon had a meaning never felt before. For he chose not the story of the Resurrection, as he had planned, but his theme was "Children," and his text read: "Except ye become as one of these little ones ye cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven."

